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TAGS: PREL MARR PGOV CH KN JA

SUBJECT: JAPANESE DEFENSE TALKS WITH CHINA

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1  
.4 (b/d).

**¶11. (C) Summary:** The Japanese Embassy in Beijing expressed satisfaction with the March 20-21 visit to China by Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada, even though the visit "accomplished little of substance." According to a Japanese Embassy readout, Hamada urged China to show greater transparency in its military budget. Chinese Minister of National Defense Liang Guanglie assured Hamada that the PLA poses no threat to its neighbors but predicted that China will eventually possess an aircraft carrier capability. China plans to host all three Japanese service chiefs in Beijing during 2009, and Liang Guanglie plans to visit Japan this year. National People's Congress Chairman Wu Bangguo, who had met with North Korean Premier Kim Jong-il the day before his meeting with Hamada, told Hamada that he had not discussed a DPRK missile launch with Kim because "Kim is mainly concerned with economic matters." End Summary.

First Meeting in Six Years

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**¶12. (C)** On March 24, Hiroyuki Namazu, Political Counselor at the Japanese Embassy in Beijing, briefed PolOff on Japanese Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada's March 20-21 visit to Beijing. Hamada's visit was the fourth official trip by a Japanese Defense Minister to China and the first since 2003. Namazu noted that during the three previous meetings, the Japanese had been hosted by the Ministry of National Defense (MND) and had made calls on senior members of the Politburo. In 1998, the Japanese met with then Premier Zhu Rongji and in 2003, they met with President Hu Jintao. This time, Defense Minister Hamada was hosted by his Chinese counterpart, Defense Minister Liang Guanglie, and had a meeting with Wu Bangguo, Politburo member and Chairman of the National People's Congress. Namazu said that, although his Embassy had requested a meeting with President Hu Jintao in his capacity as Chairman of the Central Military Commission, the GOJ did not view the Chinese substitution of Wu Bangguo for Hu Jintao as a snub. In fact, according to Namazu, Tokyo viewed Hamada's visit positively as a tangible result of improving relations between Japan and the PRC.

Light Agenda

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**¶13. (C)** Although the atmospherics of the meeting had been quite good, Namazu acknowledged that Hamada's meetings had accomplished little of substance. For instance, in response to Hamada's expression of concern over China's increased defense spending and call for greater transparency in the Chinese defense budget, Liang had rolled out his standard

talking points, assuring the Japanese that China was solely concerned with maintaining a defensive posture and posed no threat to its neighbors. Nevertheless, the two governments had agreed to continue recent mil-mil exchanges. All three Japanese service chiefs planned to visit China during 2009, and Liang planned to visit Japan during the same period. Notably, Hamada visited Tianjin on March 21 and observed a small-scale PLA live-fire exercise. Namazu believed this was the first time a Japanese Defense Minister had observed such an exercise in China.

#### Fighting Pirates

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¶4. (C) The two sides touched briefly on the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) and PLA Navy's (PLAN) participation in international efforts to combat piracy off Somalia. The Chinese asked for Japan's support for its proposal that the participating navies divide the waters off of the Horn of Africa into country-specific patrol areas to better combat piracy. Namazu said that Tokyo was studying the Chinese proposal but would likely not be able to agree to the plan because MOFA's interpretation of Japanese law would prohibit the JMSDF from using force to protect another vessel unless that vessel, its crew or its cargo had some nexus with Japan. Namazu said that there was no discussion of recent disputes over the Senkaku Islands or of the USNS *Impeccable* incident in the South China Sea.

#### Why Not an Aircraft Carrier?

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BEIJING 00000765 002 OF 002

¶5. (C) According to Namazu, in the discussion of naval issues, Defense Minister Liang told Hamada that China had enormous coastal regions to protect yet, alone among major powers, lacked an aircraft carrier. Liang added that he found it "unimaginable" to think that China would not possess a carrier in the future. He noted, however, that in order to develop a carrier capability, China would have to first think about "various aspects and impacts." While joking that maybe China no longer considered Japan a major power since the JMSDF possessed no carriers, Namazu said that Japanese experts interpreted Liang's choice of words as suggesting that, while the MND and PLAN sought a carrier capability, no formal decision to build a carrier had been made.

#### North Korea

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¶6. (C) Namazu said that Japan's MOFA and the Japanese Embassy had urged Hamada to discuss with his interlocutors North Korean plans to conduct a missile launch in April. In Hamada's conversation with the Defense Minister, Liang agreed with Hamada that the best scenario for all concerned would be for the North Koreans to cancel the launch. However, Liang did not suggest China would offer any assistance in preventing a launch. In his conversation with Wu Bangguo, Hamada noted that Wu had met with DPRK Premier Kim Yong-il in Beijing the day before (March 20) and asked whether Wu had discussed the planned launch with his North Korean guest. Accordingly to Namazu, Wu claimed that his meeting with Kim was simply to discuss plans to commemorate sixty years of Sino-North Korean relations and did not touch on missile launches. Wu reportedly told Hamada that Kim was primarily responsible for economic affairs and would not be the appropriate person to address missiles anyway.

#### No Diplomats in the Room

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¶7. (C) Namazu noted that there were no Chinese MFA participants in Hamada's meeting with Liang and that, although the Japanese Political Minister and Ambassador attended the meeting, MOFA was not represented in the

Japanese delegation. Namazu suggested that this was a mistake. Because the Japanese Embassy had much better relations with the MFA than with MND, having both MFA and MOFA present in military dialogues might increase transparency and allow for a more collaborative approach to security problems, he observed.

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